



## State of New Jersey

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 16, 2012

## Highlands Council Approves Tennessee Gas Pipeline Expansion Project

*Implementation of mitigation plan ensures consistency with goals and purposes of the Highlands Act*

CHESTER, N.J. — Today the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council approved a resolution for the completion of a Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company project, conditioned on implementation of a Comprehensive Mitigation Plan to address any potential impacts to Highlands Resources. Members of the Highlands Council, after thorough review of relevant reports and data, determined that the project meets the criteria for an exemption under the Highlands Act, which provides for “the ... upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility...provided that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of” the Highlands Act. Chairman Jim Rilee expressed his confidence in the Council’s decision.

“The Highlands Council members have engaged in a careful review of this project to ensure that necessary upgrades to utility infrastructure are done in a responsible manner and with important safeguards for our environment and residents,” said Rilee. “Several council members were able to visit and evaluate numerous areas along the existing project and, as a result of our due diligence, we believe the project adequately meets the requirements in order to move forward with appropriate and aggressive mitigation planning.”

In 2009, the Highlands Council approved the first 16 miles of this project, a capacity upgrade of the existing natural gas pipeline system, built in the 1950s, through construction a new 30-inch underground natural gas pipeline, which will run parallel to the existing 24-inch pipeline. The first 16 miles of the upgrade project has been completed; the Highlands Council today considered an additional 7.6 miles of the project.

The CMP outlines a project plan that will avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate any potential impacts to Highlands Resources with no net loss, by defining a process for identifying specific resource issues, determining how they will be addressed, and outlining plans to help mitigate unavoidable environmental impacts.

Among other required measures, the CMP will include an assessment of the potential impacts of foreseeable, but low-probability events, such as major weather or other catastrophic events including slope failure, failure of sediment and erosion control measures, and silt and mud deposition into lakes and other waterbodies. This condition is in direct response to the atypical rainfall and severe weather that occurred in August 2011. The CMP will also specifically address reforestation; open water buffers; steep slopes (with special emphasis on diffusions of flows toward lakes and streams directly downgradient); critical habitat sensitivity; protection of water resource quantity; and historical, cultural, archaeological, and scenic resource considerations. An additional component of the CMP requires Tennessee Gas to purchase natural resource lands for permanent preservation in order to mitigate for unavoidable impacts. Use of the Highlands Council GIS layers will ensure that equal value lands from a resource perspective can be identified for purchase.

“The Comprehensive Mitigation Plan helps ensure that all activities are conducted with appropriate consideration for critical natural resources in the Highlands Region as specified in the Regional Master Plan,” said Eileen Swan, Highlands Council Executive Director. “We’re pleased with the strong protections and permanent preservation of land that will take place as a result.”

Although ultimate jurisdiction for approval of the pipeline project lies with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), today’s Highlands Council action ensures that should the project be approved by FERC the Highlands Council’s enhanced environmental protections will be implemented.

Today’s actions by the Highlands Council do not take effect until 10 business days after a copy of the minutes of the meeting have been delivered to the Governor to allow time for his review and consideration.